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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

NOVEMBER 1st, 1861.

ANCIENT BRITISH MUSIC,

By the late JOHN PARRY (Barrd Alaw).

WE shall confine ourselves in this essay to ascertain, as well as we can, the origin and progress of music among the Kymry (or rather Cymry), who are avowedly the first people by whom this island is known to have been inhabited.

It may be presumed that the first musical efforts of the Kymry, as of all ancient nations, were merely *vocal*; but it is at the same time certain, that they cultivated the art in its more artificial character, at a very remote period; and perhaps their first transition from the music of nature was that of wind instruments. We find that the pipe or flute, whether under the name of *pib* or *pibgorn*, was in very early use; and most probably took the precedence of the other national instruments. An allusion to the pipe, or perhaps more properly the bagpipes, is found so early as the seventh century; when, at an *Eisteddvod*, (congress of bards and minstrels) held by King Cadwaladr, a musician was reproved for playing a tune called the Pipes of Morvudd, (*Pibau Morvudd*), and the cause of the reprimand was, that the tune was in the minor key. The horn also, under the name of *corn*, or *corn buelin*, was in early times a very common instrument, but chiefly employed on warlike occasions, or when any assemblages of the country were necessary; as in latter times has been the case in the "gathering of the clans" in the Highlands of Scotland. The most ancient Triadic memorials of Wales are full of allusions to this national custom.

Chaucer, who wrote in the 14th century, has the following notice respecting the pipes in Cornwall; and it is undisputed that the ancient Cornish and the Welsh were descended from the same stock, and their separation took place, it is probable, about the 7th or 8th century.

"Controule he would and foul faile
With *horn-pipes* of Cornwaile,
In *flutes* made he discordance
And in his music with mischance."

The description of music to which the Welsh have been; mostly attached, even from the earliest period of their history, is that of the *harp*, upon the antiquity of which instrument it is unnecessary to dwell; the frequent allusions to it in the sacred writings, and especially in the Psalms of David, prove it to have been in general use among the Hebrews. With the harp the Kymry generally associated the strains of the poet or songster, in a manner that may be regarded as peculiar to the country. This style of minstrelsy had its origin, it may be presumed, in the Bardic or Druidical institution, one of the chief duties of which was to disseminate useful instruction throughout the

community; and this, as we learn from the Institutional Triads, was done by the medium of *voice, song*, and conventional usage. Numerous authorities might be produced from the ancient Welsh records, to show that the art of music was thus, in primitive times, connected in an intimate manner with the most important establishments of the Cymry; but it will be sufficient to state, that Hu the mighty, the patriarch of the nation, is celebrated in the historical Triads, as having been the first to adapt vocal music to the preservation of memorial and invention, and, as having thus contributed to the foundation of Bardism.

Several ancient authors allude to the cultivation of music among the Celts; Diodorus Siculus, who flourished in the century preceding our era, tells us, that among the Celts were composers of melodies, who sang panegyrical or invective strains 'to instruments resembling lyres; which may safely be presumed to have been harps. The use of the harp, which had its origin in the public institutions of the Kymry, was, on the extinction of the political influence of the bards, diffused through the different ranks of society; and playing on the harp was cultivated by private individuals as a distinct art. We find from the Triads of the Social State, which are of considerable antiquity, that a harp was anciently one of the articles which the law required a gentleman by birth to possess; and it was, moreover, accounted as one of the ornaments of a clan, and, for that reason, exempted from seizure by legal process; circumstances that prove the high estimation in which this species of music was held. A notice is given of the use of the harp at a congress held in the 6th century, under the patronage of Maelgwn Gwynedd (king of North Wales), on the banks of the river Conway, which, it appears, was attended by several harpers and poets. Iorweth Beli, a bard of the 14th century, relates the event, principally on account of a stratagem practised by Maelgwn, by which the poets acquired a singular triumph over the minstrels. Maelgwn had proposed rewards to the bards and minstrels, in a *swimming* contest across the Conway; he says,

"When they came to land on the sea-boundary of the ebb
tide
The Harpers were worth nothing;
But, by reason of the fair increase of the faculty of the
wise,
The Poets composed equally well as before,
Notwithstanding their swimming."

This device was, no doubt, to give the poets the victory in the approaching congress. The laws of Hywel Dda, (Howell the good) who flourished in the 10th century, have several allusions to the practice of playing on the harp, which was evidently in considerable repute at that period. Among the officers of the Royal Household, the domestic bard filled a conspicuous place; and as, upon entering his office, he was presented with a harp by the king, the nature of his employment may be accurately ascertained; but, although to play the harp was his principal occupation, he

was also to unite with it the qualification of singing.

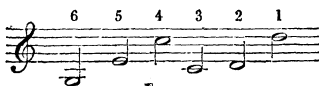
Among the persons who had the privilege of frequenting the king's palace, was the Crythor, or player on the *crwth* (or crowd), an instrument more exclusively national, perhaps, than the harp, although much inferior to it in estimation; it appears to have been played as a tenor accompaniment to the harp. The very name of *Crwth*, which implies anything bulging or protuberant, denotes the indigenous character of the instrument. It appears, too, from a Latin couplet by Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers, A.D. 609, that the *Crwth* was at that time considered the national instrument of Britain. The couplet is as follows:—

"Romanus lyrâ, plaudit tibi barbarus harpâ
Græcus Achilliâcâ,—*crota Britannia canit.*"

Crwth, or crowd, is a very ancient British instrument; the shape of it is an oblong square; and it has from three to six strings; is played on by a bow; the tone is very thin and soft; it has been many years out of use; but it certainly is an ancestor of the fiddle family.

The figure, together with the tuning of this singular instrument, is here given from Sir John Hawkins' History of Music:—

Tuning of the Cruth.

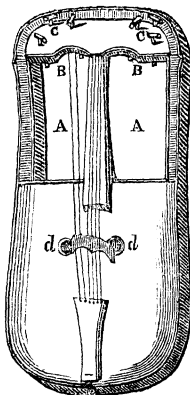


AA The apertures for the hand.

BB The strings conducted under the end board.

c c The pegs.

d d The sound-holes.



Of the tuning it is to be remarked that the sixth and fifth strings are the unison and octave of G, the fourth and third the same of C, and the second and first the same of D; so the second pair of strings are a fourth, and the third a fifth to the first.

Touching the antiquity of the cruth, it must be confessed there is but little written evidence to carry it farther back than to the time of Leland; nevertheless the opinion of its high antiquity is so strong among the inhabitants of the country where it was used, as to afford a probable ground of conjecture that the cruth might be the prototype of the whole fidicinal species of musical instruments.

Another kind of evidence of its antiquity, but which tends also to prove that the cruth was not peculiar to Wales, arises from a discovery lately made, and communicated to the Society of Antiquarians, respecting the abbey church of Melross

in Scotland, supposed to have been built about the time of Edward II. It seems that among the outside ornaments of that church, there is the figure of the instrument now under consideration very little different from the representation above given of it.

The word Cruth is pronounced in English *crowth*, and corruptly *crowd*: a player on the cruth was called a *Crowther* or *Crowder*, and so also is a common fiddler to this day; and hence undoubtedly *Crowther* or *Crowder*, a common surname.

Butler, with his usual humour, has characterized a common fiddler, and given him the name of *Crowdero*, in the following passage:—

I'th' head of all this warlike rabble,
Crowdero march'd, expert and able.
Instead of trumpet and of drum,
That makes the warrior's stomach come,
Whose noise whets valour sharp, like beer
By thunder turn'd to vinegar;
(For if a trumpet sound, or drum beat,
Who has not a month's mind to combat?)
A squeaking engine he apply'd
Unto his neck, on north-east side,
Just where the hangman does dispose,
To special friends, the knot or noose;
For 'tis great grace, when statesmen straight
Dispatch a friend, let others wait.
His warped ear hung o'er the strings,
Which was but souse to chitterlings;
For guts, some write, ere they are sodden,
Are fit for music, or for pudden:
From whence men borrow ev'ry kind
Of minstrelsy, by string or wind.
His grisly beard was long and thick,
With which he strung his fiddle-stick,
For he to horse-tail scorn'd to owe,
For what on his own chin did grow.

Hud. part I. canto II. v. 105.

Upon which passage it may be questioned why the poet has chose to make the North-east side the position of the instrument; the answer may be this: that of the four cardinal points the east is the principal, it being from thence that the day first appears; supposing then the face to be turned to the east, and in such a case as this, *cæteris paribus*, any circumstance is a motive for preference, the left is the north side, and in this situation the instrument being applied to the neck, will have a North-east direction.

The instrument above spoken of is now so little used in Wales, that there is at present but one person in the whole principality who can play on it, his name is John Morgan, of Newburgh, in the island of Anglesey; and he is now sixty years of age, there is reason to fear the succession of performers on the cruth is nearly at an end.

The *crwth* was, in the 14th century, generally made of willow; and we gather from the poems of Iorweth Beli, that it was not held in any high repute, for he says of it—

"In the days of the high primary Bards, the fine ministers of song,
Impregnated with the three gifts of eloquence,
No honour was allowed to what resembles the noise of
pigs,
The dirty gut-breaking *Crwth* of willow."

In the 10th century, music was much cultivated in Wales; and of the esteem in which it was publicly held, we may gather from the value *appropriated by law* to different harps. Those of the king and *Pencerdd* (chief-bard) were estimated at one hundred-and-twenty pence each; and those of private gentlemen at sixty pence;—prices which, with reference to the value of money in Wales at that period, were very considerable: and the privileges then enjoyed by the professors of the harp, in the sacredness of their persons, and the immunity of their lands, serve to corroborate the inference drawn in favour of the music of that time.

Dr. John David Rhys, who flourished about 1579, published a very valuable work, in Latin, on Welsh prosody; in the Appendix to which are some very curious observations relative to the state of music in Wales at various periods; these were translated by the Rev. W. J. Rees, of Cascob, and published in the second volume of the Transactions of the Royal Cambrian Institution; from which the following extracts have been made.

Prince Gruffydd ab Cynan, about the year 1042, issued out rules and regulations respecting the bards and minstrels; among which were the following:—That no one person was to exercise two callings, as poetry and playing on the harp or *crwth*. That no bard or minstrel was to possess more than the value of *ten shillings*, either in horses or cattle, or expensive apparel, under penalty of forfeiting it to the king—for *rich* men seldom devote themselves to study! An itinerent minstrel was not to go to the house of a gentleman; nor a chief minstrel to the house of a plebeian. It was the office of the itinerent minstrel to rebuke, to mock, to deride, and to entreat, by means of reproach, and all that under the pretence of singing; for which he was to receive a penny, on his acknowledging himself to belong as a mere weed to the bards; and a gibe from the company was to be given to him, that he might make light of the devil, who enticed him to idleness, riotous living, and sloth! The chief minstrel of the country was to have the marriage fines of the daughters of minstrels; he also was to have the presents of young women, when they married; that was four-and-twenty pence.

When the king was desirous to hear a song, the chief minstrel was to sing two songs, first in the hall, addressed to God, and the other respecting the king.

When the queen wished to hear a song in her apartment, the domestic bard was to sing three songs to her, *with a moderate voice*, not to occasion any disturbance in the hall. The chief minstrel must be acquainted with all the laws both of poetry and music, and be able to sing both in *harmony* and *concord*, also in cross consonancy [*query* counterpoint] and illiterations; be fond of entertaining subjects, and fertile in

wit; also to be able to retain long in his memory the praise of the nobles. The graduated probationary pupil must know *ten concords, one fundamental, five concords of accompaniment, and eight tunes*. The disciplined pupil must know double the above. The master pupil must know three times as many, and be able to explain them. The chief minstrel must know four times as many, and be acquainted with all the canons and their rules; also the *system of canons as it is set forth in the book of science*. He must be able to compose a piece for himself, and be able to give an explanation of every part of it: such as every division, and sub-division; every quantity and rest, and every change of the drawings, and key-notes, *hidden and apparent*; and to show them forth warranted from his own performance, musically and masterly, so that the doctors and chief minstrels may conscientiously adjudge and elect him to be an author and master in science.

The tunes which are named on the mixed or minor key, are 31 in number; those on the *sharp* key, A, 27; those on the *flat* key, F, 10. The contending concords, named on the mixed key, B, are 11; the concords in the flat key, F, 7, and those on the sharp key, A, 18.

That no pupil compose a song without showing it to his master, to know from his judgment that it be correct, before it be sung aloud to any one, that it may not bring shame either on the master or the pupil.

Bards and minstrels are to be of a friendly conversation, peaceable, obliging, humble, and fond of doing good offices; and all who are true subjects of the king and his magistrates should countenance and patronise the bards and minstrels.

The pupils to inquire of their masters, a month before each festival, where they are to go, lest too many go to the same place: and that but one go to a person whose income does not exceed *ten pounds*, (!) and two to him who has *twenty pounds*!

Order of Bards and Minstrels.—There are eight kinds of bards and minstrels; four graduated, and four frivolous.

The first four are—1. Bards who wear the band of their order. 2. Harpers. 3. Performers on the *crwth*. 4. Vocalists. The four kinds of frivolous ones are—1. The piper. 2. The juggler. 3. The drummer, and 4. The fiddler, or player on the *crwth* with three strings. The gratuity of each of these is one penny, and they are to perform standing. The singer ought to know how to tune a harp, or *crwth*, and accurately sing several musical lessons through their regular parts. He should also be acquainted with the four-and-twenty metres of poetry; and be able to correct any old piece of poetry which he may receive incorrect from another. He should, likewise, know how to serve from the kitchen to the table of a person of dignity and power; and to carve every fowl that comes before him. And

his office at a royal wedding is to serve at the table of the bride; a white covering is to be about the harp or *crwth*, which he brings with him.

The Club-head Vocalist is one who sings without being able to play on an instrument. He is to stand in the middle of the hall, and beat time with his club, and sing a poem or ode, with the beats.

Royal Weddings. A notice of a year and a day is given to the bards to prepare themselves to attend royal weddings; and the chief minstrel is appointed the *butt* of the rest, and he gives them an entertaining subject to exercise their poetical talents upon. After dinner the chief minstrel sits in a chair; and those who put questions to him stand; they are permitted to say against him, in poetry, anything they choose; and, on the morrow, he answers them on the subject for the amusement of the company.

The 12th century may be regarded as the Augustan era of music in Wales; for Giraldus Cambrensis, who flourished at that time, writes, that "travellers who arrived at early hours, are entertained with the conversation of young women, and music on the harp, until the evening; for every family has its maidens and harps assigned for the purpose." And, in allusion to the particular style of music then prevalent, he says, "In their musical concerts they do not sing in unison, like the inhabitants of many countries, *but in different parts*; so that in a company of singers, which one frequently meets with, in Wales, you will hear as many different parts and voices as there are performers; who all at length unite, with organic melody [in harmony], in one consonance [concord], and the soft sweetness of B flat." (*qu. G minor.*) To this he adds, that he had never witnessed a similar custom, except in the North of England, beyond the Humber; a circumstance which, when we reflect that a tribe of the Kymry anciently peopled that part of the kingdom, tends greatly to prove the antiquity of the practice.

The century which elapsed from the era just considered, until the extinction of Welsh independence, was peculiarly marked by desolation and bloodshed. Yet the harp of the Kymrie was not silent during this ominous interval; for often among the mountains and glens of Wales, were her wild notes heard, associated with the voice of the bard, to give life and hope to the soul of the warrior. But her day of joy and triumph was drawing fast to its close: with the death of the last Llywelyn (1282), died, for a season, the spirit of minstrelsy and song among the mountains of Wales. Like the Israelites of old, when sitting down to weep near the waters of Babylon, the Welsh hung up their useless harps to lament over the fall of their country, and to wait the dawn of a more propitious era!

(To be continued.)

Brief Chronicle of the last Month.

ANDOVER.—The Choral Society commenced their third season at the beginning of October, for the rehearsal and performance of music generally, and elementary instruction. During the last year the society gave, in the Town Hall, four concerts of vocal and instrumental music. Performers, the Misses E. Criswick, Sincock, and Herbert, Messrs. Stephens, Gibbs, and Bennett; the latter gentleman being conductor.

BEVERLY.—Mr. Frazer gave his musical entertainment at this town, on the 15th of October, which was well attended. Pianist, Mr. C. H. Hunt.

BIRMINGHAM.—Mr. William Howell has been appointed organist to the Wesleyan Chapel, Bradford-street, as successor to Mr. J. Halmshaw.

BRISTOL.—The members of the choir of St. George's Church gave a concert of vocal music on the 23rd ult., at the School-room, Summerhill-house, in aid of the funds for the repairs of the Parish Church, which were rendered necessary owing to the damage done by the gales in March last. The performers consisted chiefly of amateurs in the neighbourhood, and was conducted by Mr. Allen, of Bristol; Mr. Sayer presiding at the pianoforte. The music was very creditably sung.

BRIXTON.—On Tuesday evening, October 22nd, a class for the practice of vocal music commenced at the school-room, St. James's Road, Angell Town. Mr. G. F. Stuber has very kindly allowed the room, which is well lighted and arranged, to be used for the above purpose gratuitously. Mr. W. H. Starey, organist of St. John's, is hon. secretary.

CAMBERWELL.—On Tuesday evening, September 24th, a concert, consisting of sacred and secular music, was given at Camberwell Hall, at which a highly respectable audience was present. The first part consisted of an excellent selection of sacred music, and which was very efficiently rendered. This part was brought to a conclusion by a duet from *Guillaume Tell*, (pianoforte, Miss E. Stirling; violin, Mr. Kemp,) and which indeed was a brilliant performance. The second part of the programme consisted of a good selection of secular music, and contained several glees, all of which were very well done. Miss E. Stirling's song, "A wet Sheet," sung by Mr. Bridge, gained an encore. "All among the Barley," accompanied (*ad. lib.*) by the composer, Miss Stirling, was rapturously redemanded. The other performers were Miss Roberts, Miss Gibbard, Miss Newson, Mr. Lubbock, and Mr. Waterson. Mr. Bridge conducted. The competition for the situation of organist at Camden Church, has resulted in the election of Mr. Henry Gadsby, organist of St. Ann's, Blackfriars.

CHELtenham.—A new organ, erected in St. Paul's Church, was opened on Saturday, the 22nd of September, by Mr. Taylor, organist of Crypt Church, Gloucester. The chants, anthems, and hymns, were well sung by a very efficient choir, and the power and beauty of the organ were brought out with great effect by Mr. Taylor.

CRYSTAL PALACE.—School of Art, Science, and Literature.—This school, which was commenced last year, has been patronized largely, especially by persons resident in the vicinity of Sydenham. The regulations for the ensuing year, ending July 31st, 1862, have just been issued. The classes of painting, languages, and science generally, have the names of well known professors appended to them, and in the musical department the names of Messrs. Benedict, Lindsay Sloper, Prout, H. Leslie, and J. G. Calcott, Madame Garcia, Mrs. Street, and Miss Whyte, give promise of superior instruction. The first course of lectures by Dr. Draper and Dr. Lancaster, commenced on the 17th ultimo, specially addressed to those who may be preparing to exhibit in competition at the international exhibition of 1862.

FOREST GATE, Stratford.—Haydn's *Creation* was performed.
(Continued on page 139.)